

Focus on People

Compiled by Heike Hasenauer

WHEN SSG Ezzard Smith joined the Army, he was given a choice of three jobs: infantryman, cook or supply clerk.

"My mother talked me into being a cook; she said that I could cook for the ladies," Smith said. "When I enlisted, I didn't know how to cook. I could only boil water for rice."

Now a member of 3rd Army at Fort McPherson, Ga., Smith is the mess sergeant responsible for feeding some 100 soldiers deployed to the Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force compound in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Before he arrived, the only hot meals the soldiers could count on were the MREs they heated for themselves.

Smith serves two hot meals every day. "I know the soldiers miss their mommas' cooking, so I try to give them a little taste of

home," said Smith, who supervises three Afghans in the kitchen. "Language is a barrier, because they speak only a little English. I'm picking up a little Dari, but my progress has been slow."

Being in Afghanistan and working with the Afghans has been an educational experience, Smith said. His co-workers taught him how to prepare a traditional Afghan rice dish that elicited rave reviews from the soldiers. He, in turn, taught the Afghans how to make "hobo coffee," a method of making coffee in the field without a pot.

While he's enjoying the opportunity to bring a little edible comfort to soldiers in the field, Smith said he doesn't have the opportunity to show off what he can really do in a kitchen. That's because he serves mostly military T-rations — prepackaged meals for groups — and canned goods. He's not allowed to buy and serve local foods.

To jazz up the usually bland military food, Smith often adds spices that soldiers have donated, such as Creole seasoning, cinnamon, paprika and garlic, which aren't included with military T-rations.

Sometimes, he surprises soldiers with homemade desserts from canned fruits. "All we do is put on some crust and make it into pie or cobbler. That's called enhancing T-rats," Smith said, with a smile.

He knows good food is a morale booster for deployed soldiers, so he tries to find different ways to present the meals he serves. "People eat with their eyes. When they see something different and it looks

good, they're going to eat," he said. — SPC Tyrone Walker, 314th Press Camp Headquarters

THEY arrived at Fort Drum, N.Y., not knowing each other or what their new jobs would be. Now they're best friends who have just completed their first mission in Afghanistan.

PFCs Arthur Hubble and **Justin Gabhart** of the 10th Mountain Division's Company B, 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, have been best friends for two years.

"When we arrived at the unit, my platoon sergeant decided to make Gabhart and me M-240 machine-gunners," said Hubble. "So we often went to the range together."

Hubble, from St. Cloud, Fla., and Gabhart, from Hutchinson, Kan., understood how important their jobs were during Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan.

The two provided most of the firepower that enabled their platoon to achieve its mission objectives, they said.

"We were responsible for 70 percent of the firepower for the platoon. Our job was to suppress enemy fire and to keep the enemies' heads down, so our riflemen and grenadiers could move forward to the



Smith: Cooking in Kabul
SPC Tyrone Walker

"I know the soldiers miss their mommas' cooking, so I try to give them a little taste of home."

SPC Roderick Turner



objective and assault through," Gabhart said. "If one of us had gone down, 35 percent of the firepower would have been lost. If both of us had gone down, the rest of the platoon would have been sitting ducks."

Their friendship helped get them through what they encountered in the mountains of Afghanistan, they said.

Their biggest challenge was staying alive when they were fired upon, the men said.

"It's a scary feeling knowing you may be killed," Gabhart said. "But once the bullets start to fly, you forget all about being scared. We watched each other's backs out there. That's what friends do for each other."

Operation Anaconda behind them, the two friends look forward to what lies ahead.

"I'm serving a six-year enlistment, so I'm looking forward to other deployments over the next four years," Hubble said.

Regardless of what the future brings, the two agree they plan to remain the best of friends. — *SPC Roderick Turner, 314th PCH*

SOLDIERS deployed to the Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force in Kabul, Afghanistan, recently got a surprise from home that's helped to reassure them they are not forgotten.

"I had just returned to Kabul from a mission at Kandahar Air Base, where the 'Hands for Peace' art work and other gestures of U.S.- and coalition-nation support are displayed all over the terminal," said **MAJ Brian Hathaway**. "I felt like the soldiers in Kabul were being forgotten — until our own poster came."

Hathaway, who's assigned to Company D, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, Fort Bragg, N.C., is working for the CJCMOTF in Kabul, where he's contributing to humanitarian-aid efforts.

Kara Carriker, Hathaway's sister, an elementary school teacher at Windsor Oaks Elemen-

CPL Holly Plata

Hathaway: Showing off kids' poster.

tary School in Virginia Beach, Va., helped her students make a colorful, cheerful poster of handprint doves with olive branches.

"She wanted to show her support to all of us," said Hathaway, who also has a brother in the military. The two have been deployed many times in recent years. During the one year that Hathaway's been married, in fact, he's been away from home nine months. "My sister's concerned about that."

The poster, displayed in the main entrance of Hathaway's office building, draws daily comments, he said.

"Most of the new soldiers don't know where it came from, but they all seem to appreciate it. Several people have asked for my sister's address, so they can write thank-you letters," he said.

The children who created the poster couldn't have known the impact it would make on the soldiers so far from home.

"But their work has had a very positive impact on all of us at CJCMOTF. Their artwork is the only visible thing where we're located that says someone in the United States is thinking about us," Hathaway said.

To keep up the soldiers' spirits, Hathaway's sister said she plans to send 600 letters from her school to CJCMOTF soon. — *CPL Holly Plata, 314th PCH*

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Hubble (left) and Gabhart: Best friends in Afghanistan.

